

We're Friends Right?

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We're Friends Right?

_This could easily be a one-shot, but it also has the potential to become a full-fledged story. I'm not sure which option I'll go with, but for now I figured this has been sitting on my computer for almost two years. It's about time I share it with others. I actually have a few 'Zack survives' ideas that I've been working on, but this one not only shows the most promise, but also had the most written for it. I think I may only upload one other version though, because it's different from this one, even if it shares similar moments. I just can never make up my mind when it comes to story plots sometimes. That or i'm either lazy or over critical of my own writing. I really am my harshest critic. u_u_

_Anyway, I hope you enjoy this and please, let me know if you want to read more. I'll be happy to continue this if you want me to.
:)_

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Enjoy!

* * *

><p>We're Friends, Right?

Another year had gone by. It was two years after the events of Omega and three years after Sephiroth's last defeat. Many things had changed and for once it was all good. The city of Edge was strong and becoming a large metropolis similar to how Midgar had been, only this time there would be no reactors surrounding them to make the people

feel caged in, no plates towering overhead to block out the sun and no sectors to separate the people. For once they were free.

The New Shinra Company had slowly begun to build a new reputation for itself. Rufus still didn't fully grasp the idea of what the people wanted, but he was a far better man than his father had been. To his annoyance the WRO was more loved by the people. It was headed by its CEO, Reeve who had proven to the people that they would be there during a crisis as they had in the past.

Other businesses were doing very well in the city, including a bar known as the Seventh Heaven which also served as the headquarters for Strife Delivery Service. The rain was pouring hard outside keeping patrons inside. The bar maid was keeping herself busy mixing drinks and cooking the food that her customers would order. One of her regulars turned on the juke box in the corner and raised his glass. "Come on Tifa, How 'bout joinin' me in a dance?"

With a knowing smile she poured a drink for another customer and slid the drink over to him, "Now Miles, you know I'm working, besides what if a cute girl walks in and see's me with you? She may think you're taken,"

The man laughed and slapped his leg, "H'aw yer a sweet girl, always puttin' others before yourself,"

Tifa shook her head as the man carried on dancing. There was different reason why she didn't dance with him, aside from the fact that he wasn't her type and listening to the sound of the engine cutting off from outside she could tell that the reason was about to enter through the front door.

He came in soaking wet and looking like he had just climbed out of a river. Taking one quick glance at him Tifa could tell he hadn't been having a good day. Cloud sat down on one of the stools at the bar and slouched over the counter, letting out a tired sigh. Today had sucked. Three deliveries and while they hadn't been very far out he was stuck in the rain for most of the afternoon.

"I take it you'd like something stronger than the usual?" Tifa asked him without needing an answer, though a grunt from the blonde had told her all she needed to hear. She went to work mixing the one drink that she knew would take the edge off; The Nibelheim Special. A drink she had learned to mix in their hometown. She had tweaked it a bit and added a few of her own ingredients to make it even more unique and it was much stronger than any of her other drinks. In fact it was so strong that only a person with mako running through their veins could handle it.

She slid the glass over to him who took a swig, shaking his head afterwards and getting the man next to him wet from the water that flew from his drenched spiky hair which was laying flat from the soaking he had gotten. "Why'd it have to rain today?" he asked to no one in particular. "Of all the days it had to be this one."

Tifa wiped a glass with a clean rag before offering him a small dry towel. "Well, at least you're done for the day. If you'd like I'll make you some hot soup if you wanted to dry off upstairs?"

As much as Cloud wanted to accept her offer he shook his head,

"Can't. I have one more stop to make."

Tifa tilted her head, "But you only had three deliveries today, where else do you need to go?" But Cloud was already getting up and heading for the door. "I'll be back soon," he promised and then he was gone. Tifa could sense there was something bothering him, but it was up to him if he wanted to talk about it. She wouldn't pressure him. He was definitely a lot better now than he was in the past.

She was about to take what was left of Cloud's drink and pour it down the sink when two men hurried in and closed the door behind them, "Shinra SOLDIERS!" one shouted to the other patrons.

"Where?" asked one man, "Outside. There's only one, but it looks like he's comin' this way!" The others gathered by the windows to peer outside. Tifa looked up, wondering what Shinra wanted now and why were they sending a SOLDIER? Why not just have one of the Turks call or have Reno stop by? Unless this guy was from the old Shinra in which case—

Tifa pulled out her gloves and strapped them on, not knowing what to expect, but wanting to be prepared all the same as she watched the entrance. The man slowly opened the door and stumbled inside. He looked like he had gone through hell and he was soaking wet, his eyes glowed in the room that was dimly lit compared to outside. He definitely had mako. As Tifa went to approach him he clutched his chest and coughed, droplets of blood splattered on the floor as he gasped for breath and collapsed. Tifa hurried over and knelt down to check for a pulse. She found one, but it was weak.

Rolling him over she tried to get a good look at him only for her eyes to grow wide with surprise. She knew this man!

— . . . —

Cloud rode out to the cliff overlooking the ruins of Midgar. It was something he did on this day every year. Even if the sword that once stood in the ground was now polished and sitting in the old Sector Five Church this cliff was still an important place for him. It was where his best friend had given his own life to save his in a final stand against an army of troopers. With a bitter feeling welling up within him Cloud remembered. It was raining that day too. The day that Zack died and with his final breath declared Cloud was to be his living legacy. So much had happened since then, but Cloud had kept his promise.

Today marked the anniversary of his friend's death and every year Cloud paid his respects by visiting the place where Zack had fallen. When Cloud arrived he was surprised at the sight that greeted him. The field of flowers that had begun to grow over the years had spread out from the spot where the sword had once stood. Cloud liked to think it was Aerith's way of honoring Zack, but now the flowers were dead; every single one of them. It was as if the lifestream had drained all of the life from them.

Cloud didn't want to put too much thought into it. The land around Midgar was still barren and anything could have caused the flowers to die. He didn't want to read too much into it and hoped it wasn't a bad sign of something to come. Things had been going so well lately that he didn't want anything to change that. With a heavy sigh he

knew that trouble had a nasty habit of finding him. The only thing he could do was to make sure he was ready for whatever storm lay ahead.

A rumble of thunder brought him out of his thoughts as he looked up at the sky. The clouds were getting darker, but thankfully it only meant that the sun was setting. The rain wasn't showing any signs of letting up however, and there was a chill in the air. He stood there for a minute more to finish paying his respects before heading back over to Fenrir. He put his goggles on and revved up his bike before taking off.

When he got back to the bar he was surprised to see it closed early. Tifa never closed before eight unless something was wrong. As he parked Fenrir in the Garage he opened the hidden side compartments of the bike revealing the several blades that made up his Fusion Sword. Taking the blades, he combined them into one before carefully heading inside, not knowing what to expect.

When he entered the bar he saw Denzel sitting at one of the empty booths. He looked up as he saw Cloud enter. "Denzel, what's going on?" he asked.

The boy looked worried, but didn't move from his spot. "Tifa and Marlene are upstairs," he began, "there's a man who's hurt pretty bad and they're trying to help him. I stayed down here to clean the floor." He hesitated for a minute and looked down at his glass of juice. "I finished that a while ago, but I was afraid to go back up there so Iâ€¦"

"You wanted to wait for me?" asked Cloud.

The boy nodded.

He felt bad for the kid, knowing he had gone through a lot in the past. After what happened with the Remnants and GeoStigma Denzel had become a lot more open about his past to them and told them of the tragedies that he had seen which started from the collapse of the Plate in Sector Seven when he lost his parents. Everything seemed to get worse from there and the boy had seen so much death it was amazing that he was this strong.

But time heals all wounds and so does a supportive family. Cloud placed a hand on Denzel's shoulder as he walked by, "I'm going to go check on them, but I'll be back down shortly."

"Okay," the boy replied and Cloud made sure he was alright before heading upstairs.

Being careful not to make much noise he headed up the stairs and listened into the room that was Cloud's office. He could make out voices as two sets of feet shuffled around the room. "Marlene, I need you to put some pressure here while I get some more gauze. Good, now please hand me that roll of bandages over there,"

"This one?"

"Yeah."

There was a high-pitched moan as the man winced in pain, "Shh, it's

okay," Tifa cooed, "you're going to be alright, but we have to remove these bullets. I know it hurts, just hang on a bit longer. We're almost done."

Cloud was about to reach for the doorknob when he heard Tifa give Marlene another order, "Marlene, I need a fresh bowl of water,"

"Yes Miss Tifa, I'll be right back," with that the door opened as the little girl exited the room carrying a bowl of dirty water that was tinted red. She almost bumped into Cloud, but he had taken a step back.

"Cloud!" she shouted with a relieved smile.

"What's going on?" he asked.

The little girl didn't want to be rude, but Tifa needed the water quickly. She headed towards the bathroom, "A man came into the bar and collapsed. He was bleeding real bad and Tifa says he has several bullet wounds to his chest. She's trying to get them out, but it's not easy. The wounds keep wanting to close and she has to keep them open so she can get all of the bullets out."

"Wounds don't heal that fast," Cloud told her, confused.

"His do," she replied. "I think it's because his eyes glow, kinda like yours do sometimes."

That got his attention. "Marlene," he began to ask, but stopped. She was still young and probably wouldn't know if the man had been in SOLDIER. "Never mind, I'll find out for myself." He waited for Marlene to finish getting fresh water before opening the door for her and following behind.

His office had been turned into an emergency room as he looked around and saw all of his things had been pushed to the side. Several sheets and towels had been placed on the floor where the man was laying, but Cloud couldn't get a good look since Tifa was hovering over his chest, trying to remove another bullet.

Another moan escaped the man as she worked, "I'm sorry, I know you're in pain, but I'm almost done. I have to get this one out, it's too close to your heart."

Marlene set the water down next to Tifa who nodded her thanks, but didn't turn. She had to stay focused if this man was going to pull through. Cloud just stood there and watched.

The man winced in pain as she worked. Tifa was trying to be careful, but this bullet was stubborn and she had to concentrate. One wrong move and it could nick his heart or damage his lung. "I need you to keep still," she told him before she noticed Cloud in the corner of her eye. "I could use your help," she told him.

The blonde swordsman removed the sword from his back and set it to the side, knowing now that it wasn't needed. "With what?"

"Hold him still while I try to remove the bullets. Poor guy is full of them!"

Cloud moved over and knelt down next to her before trying to get a good look at the man she was helping. A towel was covering his face to prevent him from seeing his own injuries and freaking out. Still, it didn't take a doctor to see the seriousness of his wounds. His chest was a red mess of blood from the multiple gunshot wounds. It was a miracle he was even still alive, even if he was in SOLDIER.

Cloud held him as still as he could while Tifa worked. She safely removed the one bullet and quickly went to work with the others. She was going to leave them, since the man had been moving too much to remove them safely, but with Cloud's help it made it easier for her to work. During the next half hour she had removed twenty-three more bullets. During that time Cloud had sent Marlene to check on Denzel. He felt bad that he hadn't gone back downstairs to check on him like he said and Marlene was still young and didn't need to see this level of trauma yet.

By the time she had removed the twenty-third bullet the man's breathing had become shallow and he had grown paler. Cloud noticed his struggles had become weaker. "Tifa, I think he'sâ€¦"

"He's just tired," Tifa replied, but she reached over to her first aid kit and pulled out a Restore Materia and cast Cure. The wounds began to heal faster and the man didn't look as pale. "I didn't just spend the last two hours saving his life for him to die on me now. Besides, He's already suffered enough."

Cloud got up and headed for his office phone. Tifa looked up at him, "What are you doing?"

"Calling for an ambulance," he replied. Now that Tifa had gotten the man stable he could be moved, but Tifa got up and pushed down on the receiver. "Tifa?"

"There's a reason why I didn't send for one first. His record lists him among the dead,â€¦and there's something else."

"Something else?"

"He needs you to help him through this, Cloud. No one else can do it."

Cloud gave her the most confused look until she let out a tired sigh and knelt down by his head. "I think he's passed out, which is a good thing. If he saw you, I think it might be too much for him, I'm still not sure how you'll take it," she told him.

The warrior stood there, blinking at her, he was torn between curiosity and nervousness. Tifa looked up at Cloud as she touched the cloth that was covering the man's face, "Promise me you won't freak out?"

Cloud nodded in response and she pulled back the towel showing the man's face. Cloud's entire world came to a sudden halt. Laying there in front of him was Zack! Cloud took a step back, but couldn't tear his eyes away from the warrior before him. How was Zack alive? Why did he have these injuries? It was too close to what happened to him that day, years ago when he died on the cliff. Cloud had to search his memories, afraid that for a minute his friend really hadn't died,

No. He had definitely died on that cliff. So, how was he here?

"Cloud?"

He looked up to see Tifa giving him a worried look. "I-I'm alright," he stammered; voice shaky. If he was being honest with himself, he wasn't alright.

** . . . **

The next morning sunlight filtered in through the blinds of the window in Cloud's office. The dust danced in the shafts of light. Down on the floor Zack slowly opened his eyes. He slowly blinked and stared up at the ceiling for a moment before memories from yesterday came back to him. He had been in pain, making his painful trek from the wastelands surrounding Midgar into the settlement that had become Edge. He didn't remember it being there nor did he remember Midgar being in ruins. His only focus was to find help for his injuries. He remembered stumbling into a building before doubling over and that was it. There was a voice he remembered; someone calling to him, telling him it would be alright. She reminded him of some of the instructors back in Shinra HQ, coaching him through his training.

The pain he had felt last night which had been so sharp and unbearable was now reduced to a dull ache in his chest and it hurt every time he took a breath, but at least he was alive. If he had survived the night than he figured he'd be okay. As his vision became clearer Zack decided to take a look at his surroundings.

Turning his head he saw a tire in the corner of the room. A motorcycle tire from the looks of it, there was a desk in the far corner that looked like it had been pushed aside, probably to give him more room. There were pictures on the walls and a message board cluttered with notes and papers. This was probably someone's office he assumed. Looking over towards the door he saw something that jolted him fully awake. Sitting, slouched over with his back against the wall next to the door was his best friend!

No, Zack had to be seeing things. Spiky wouldn't be in a place like this, but after carrying the guy around for almost a year he'd know that spiky blonde hair anywhere. It had to be him! What was he doing here? Zack had to check on him, hoping that he was alright. He sat up, but clutched his chest with one hand and let out a cry of pain.

Hearing the painful cry, Cloud's head shot up as he looked over at his friend. The blonde hadn't meant to fall asleep, but the long day he had had the previous day combined with the long night of watching over his friend had tired him out. That didn't stop him from hurrying over to his friend's side when he saw him in pain however.

"Take it easy, you've been through a lot."

Zack focused on getting his pain under control before looking over at his friend. Pain or no pain, nothing could hold back that smile.

"Spiky? You're alright?"

"Yeah,"

"You beat the mako poisoning, you came out of it!"

With a slow nod, Cloud finally understood what his friend was getting at. In the last moments of Zack's life Cloud had just begun to come out of his comatose state. "Yeah," he replied, "thanks to you."

Zack waved it off, "Bah, you beat that on your own. All I did was keep you alive long enough for you to snap out of it." He smirked at his best bud with a wink before letting out a painful cough.

Cloud gently pushed him back down, "Yeah, well it's my turn to look after you now, so just lay back and relax. You've still got some healing to do."

With a painful nod Zack did as his friend said. "Don't worry Spiky, I'm not goin' anywhere. It'll take a lot more than that to kill this ex-SOLDIER."

Cloud hid a knowing smile, "Yeah, I know."

Zack took another look around the room, "So where are we?"

"In my office," Cloud simply replied.

Zack arched an eye brow, "No seriously, where are we?"

"In my office," Cloud repeated this time in a more serious tone. "A lot's happened in the past few years."

"What are you talking about, Spiky? It didn't take me more than a day to get to the outskirts of Midgar, even with these injuries."

"Zack,â€|" Cloud tried to tell his friend as easily as he could, "several years have passed since we were attacked on the cliff."

"That's impossible," Zack said.

"It's true, and a lot has happened since then."

"Like what?"

Cloud wanted to tell him all that had happened, but he didn't want to aggravate his friend's injuries. "When you're feeling better I promise I'll tell you everything, right now all you need to know is that we don't have to worry about anyone else coming after us, You can rest easy."

Zack wasn't happy that he was being kept in the dark, but he trusted his best friend. "Okay Spike, but once I'm recovered I want to know the full details."

Cloud smirked as he stood up, "You got it."

He headed towards the door, "I have to check the on the kids, but I'll be back soon." With that he left with Zack's wide eyes watching him go in surprise. "Kids?!"

Downstairs Tifa was making the kids breakfast when Cloud entered the kitchen, sat down at the table and covered his hands over his face in an act of frustration.

"How is he?" asked Tifa, looking up from pouring Marlene some juice.

"Awake and as curious as the energetic puppy that he always was," Cloud replied. "He doesn't realize how much time has passed since that day on the cliff and I have no idea how he'll react to the news when he hears how long it's been."

"Want to tell him together?" she offered.

Cloud cast her a thankful glance, "It'd probably help coming from more than one person."

Tifa sensed it was more than that. He probably needed someone to be there when he told his friend to help them both through it. Tifa remembered another time when she was needed to help Cloud through past memories and she was only too willing to help him through it again.

The swordsman looked over at Denzel next, "you alright?"

The boy nodded before looking down at his plate. He had barely touched his breakfast. "Is he going to be okay?"

"He'll be fine," Cloud replied, "he's tougher than I am."

"I doubt that," Denzel replied only to realize too late what he had said out loud, "I mean, that isâ€¦umâ€¦"

Cloud just smirked and ruffled the kid's hair.

A few hours later, after the kids had left for school Tifa had gone upstairs to check on the wounded warrior while Cloud was keeping an eye on things downstairs. Ever since Cloud learned that his friend was back among the living he had canceled his deliveries for the next couple of days. He knew that there wasn't much he could do to help, but there was no way he'd be able to carry on business as usual so soon, at least until his friend's injuries had healed more. His condition was no longer critical, but those were still some serious wounds.

When Tifa came down he looked up from serving a drink to a customer. "How is he?"

"Asleep and his chest still hurts, but that's only to be expected. Even with mako it'll take a few more days before he can start moving around."

Spinning a bottle in his hand he poured a drink for another customer and slid the glass down to him. Tifa tilted her head, impressed. "Well, someone's been learning some neat tricks."

Cloud merely shrugged, "It's no different from spinning my sword."

Tifa leaned into him as she passed by, "You'll have to teach me

sometime." He tried to hide the slight blush that tinted his face by pouring a glass for another customer, but Tifa saw it. "Oh, I forgot to get some extra towels from upstairs, you mind getting them for me?" she asked as she headed towards the kitchen. Cloud nodded and headed upstairs.

When he passed the door to his office he heard a noise coming from inside, deciding to check on his friend first he poked his head inside only to open the door wide and enter. "What are you doing?"

Zack had been using the office chair to help him stand up, but it wasn't exactly easy. As the wheels gave into the pressure and moved forward Cloud hurried over and caught the wounded SOLDIER before he fell. "I forgot how stubborn you could be!" he said as he caught him, throwing one of Zack's arms over his shoulder to help him stand up straight so as not to aggravate his injuries.

"I can't stay in one place for very long, you know that. I'll be fine, I just gotta stand up and stretch. Maybe a few squats will help me feel better."

"Do you have a death wish?" Cloud asked, annoyed.

Zack only let out a quiet chuckle, "Well, I did have one thought up to be honest. I mean, I didn't think I was going to make it off of that cliff alive."

Cloud helped his friend sit down in his office chair before locking the wheels, making sure it wouldn't roll away again. Cloud couldn't bring himself to tell his friend the truth, not just yet. Instead he just kept quiet and let Zack talk, which he did.

"I wonder what to do now that I made it back to Midgar? I remember we talked about bein' mercenaries, but now that I'm here it don't sound that appealing. Maybe I can be a handyman or something."

"I know a place that has an opening," Cloud informed him. "It pays good and you'd get to travel a lot."

"Really?" asked Zack, sounding very interested. "Do you have the number?"

With a smirk, Cloud took one of the business cards sitting on his desk and slid it over to Zack who picked it up and read it. There was a logo of a motorbike with the words _'Strife Delivery Service'_ written on it, below the logo was the slogan: _You name it We deliver it._

Zack thought about it for a moment, a delivery service. It sounded like a good job and it sure beat working in an office all day. That's when realization hit him as he looked at the card more closely, "Hold on," he looked over at his friend, remembering that Strife was Cloud's last name. "You mean it?"

Cloud simply shrugged, "I've been getting a lot of business lately and it's not always easy trying to keep up with orders. I haven't really thought about hiring anyone else to help, but if you want the job it's yours."

There was a creaking sound and before Cloud could blink he found himself pulled into a crushing hug. "YOU'RE THE BEST SPIKY!"

"Zack,â€|your injuries," Cloud grunted under the crushing grip. He had forgotten how it felt to get a bone-crushing bear hug from his friend.

"It's worth it," the dark-haired man replied as he laughed, trying to hide how much it really was hurting. A giggle behind the door alerted him to know they weren't alone and he let go, finally allowing Cloud to breathe.

Cloud hadn't heard it as he rotated his shoulder, "First rule, no crushing the boss."

Zack pointed to the door behind him and Cloud turned to see Tifa leaning against the door frame. "Oh, don't let me interrupt. Please, go on,"

The blonde felt a bit embarrassed while at the same time hoping she hadn't seen too much. "I think we should bring him up to date on the current events tonight after the bar closes and the kids are put to bed."

Tifa nodded in agreement. "I'll close up early then, if that's the case."

Zack once again found himself at a total loss, "Since when do you have kids?"

__** . . . **__

A few hours later the three were sitting at one of the empty booths in the bar area. The kids had already come home and had been asked to go to bed early by their guardians and they obeyed. Cloud felt bad about not explaining what was going on, but he promised he'd make it up to them. He and Tifa had just finished telling Zack all that had happened since the ex-SOLDIER's death. Now Zack was sitting there in silence as he tried to take everything in. It was a lot and Tifa wondered if it had still been too soon to tell him.

"Are you alright?" she finally asked.

"It's just,â€|for once I don't know what to say. I mean everything that happened, all that you guys went through,"

"Don't worry about us," Cloud told him, "We've had time to cope, how are _you_ taking all of this?"

"Iâ€|I'm glad I'm sitting down," he replied. "I mean, Sephiroth coming back, that whole ugly mess with Deepground and then what happened to Aerith?" He clenched his hand on the table as he tried to control his grief over her loss. Somehow he couldn't help feeling that part of it was his fault. Because he hadn't been there to save her. That's when another hand placed itself over his shaking fist. Zack looked up at his best friend who held nothing but complete understanding in his eyes.

"I know, Zack. Believe me; even if you had been there there was

nothing you could have done. I was standing right in front of her when Sephiroth struck her down."

"He's blamed himself enough times for it too," Tifa added, remembering the guilt he had carried around for two years after that event.

"Well, I don't blame you," Zack replied. "We both know what that man was capable of, I'm just glad he's finally gone; same with Shinra, at least the worst of it."

"I still don't fully trust Rufus," Tifa admitted, "but he's definitely done a better job than I would have expected."

"He keeps to his own agenda," Cloud told her, remembering when the new president had asked him for his help when the Remnants appeared. Rufus had mentioned that he knew there were children living with the delivery boy, it was a tactic used to win Cloud's sympathy, he still remembered the new president's words, "I understand there are children living with you, don't you want to put smiles back on their faces?" _However Cloud could also sense a threat behind those words. He knew Rufus was the type of person who wasn't above kidnapping. Especially with the Turks under his command. If the man became desperate enough he would most likely try to use the kids against them. Something Cloud would kill him for if he tried.

"He can be trusted as long as the outcome benefits him in some way, but I wouldn't put my complete trust in him."

"Never turn your back on a member of the Shinra family," Zack added, fully agreeing. "So, is there anyone else we have to worry about? With Sephiroth and the old president dead and that whole Deepground thing taken care of, is there anything else to worry about?"

"I wouldn't exactly say I wouldn't be surprised if some new threat came along, but there's no one else I can think of that would be starting trouble."

"Are you sure Hojo's dead?" asked Zack.

"He's dead." Cloud's reply was solid, there was no doubt in his mind that the mad scientist was gone, both his body and now whatever was left of his mind. "After Vincent told us that he had blended his mind with the leader of Deepground Reeve developed a kind of antivirus that travels through every computer and if it finds any trace of Hojo it purges the system and wipes it out."

"Good, now I can rest a little bit easier," replied Zack, letting his shoulders sag a bit.

Cloud and Tifa exchanged relieved glances. Zack was taking the news a lot better than they both expected.

"_Soo_," Zack asked in a mischievous tone, getting their attention, "you two have kids now?"

"Uh," Cloud and Tifa looked at each other before Cloud looked away, trying (but failing) to hide the blush while Tifa let out a small giggle. "Not exactly," she replied, saving Cloud from any further embarrassment. "Marlene's adopted father is a friend of ours and we

took Denzel in when he didn't have anywhere else to go. We've more or less treated him as our own after Cloud found the cure to GeoStigma."

"That's cool," Zack replied.

Cloud turned to face him, "That's all you have to say?"

At this, Zack gave his friend a mischievous grin, "What, you wanted me to tease you about how red your face is?"

"Wha, well no, but," Cloud stammered, but Zack's laughter cut him off. "Relax, Spiky. I'm just havin' fun, you're so serious, I'm just tryin' to loosen you up."

Tifa just sat back and smiled. Already she was seeing how much good this was doing for Cloud to have his friend back in his life. With such an easy-going optimistic personality it was easy for Tifa to see how he had kept Cloud alive during their time on the run. "So Zack, what are you going to do now?"

The ex-SOLDIER folded his arms in thought, "Well, aside from my new job I'm not really sure," he just shrugged at the thought, "I guess I'll just take it one day at a time just like before."

_ . . . _

The next day Zack had slept in, courtesy of a sleeping pill given by Tifa the previous night. She wanted to make sure his injuries healed properly and it wasn't easy when he kept aggravating them by moving around. Cloud was right; he was just like an energetic puppy. Cloud had left to run some urgent high end deliveries for a costumer that lived in a nearby town. Now it was just Tifa and Zack alone in the house. She kept herself busy by cleaning up the bar and checking her stocks. She'd have to make a run to the store in the next few days.

While Tifa was busy downstairs, Zack had decided to look around upstairs. Looking around the kids' room he couldn't help but notice the large statue across the way of an angel with wings that seemed to be watching over the bar. Zack just stood and stared at it for a while trying to figure out why he had been sent back and why now years after his death? That brought up a new question and it was something that really bugged him.

Tifa had just finished washing the glasses and getting them ready for tonight when she heard the bar door open. "Sorry, we're closed. Come back at four."

Something cold pressed against her back and she looked up, "Don't move," came a gruff voice. Tifa knew that was the barrel of a gun pressed against her back. "What do you want?"

"Shut your mouth," he replied harshly. She glared hatred at the man who was still behind her, but didn't move. "Yeah, that's what I thought. Not so tough without that biker freak hangin' around, are ya?"

He jabbed the gun harshly into her back, "Gimme all the cash you got in this dump!" Tifa nodded, "Alright, You win, just don't shoot!"

Tifa wasn't afraid of this guy in the least, if only he didn't have a gun she'd turn on him and give him a kick that would send him flying out the door, but if Zack's SOLDIER hearing was anything like Cloud's than he'd hear her from almost anywhere in the house if she was loud enough.

She slowly made her way over to the cash register and went to punch in a code to open it. "C'mon, move faster. If yer stallin' for that freak to return I'll bury a bullet in your spine!"

A hand suddenly grabbed the guy's neck and gripped tightly, cutting off the man's air supply. The man gurgled and his hands began to shake.

"Drop the gun," came a low tone and Tifa slightly turned to see the glowing blue eyes of Zack Fair casting a deadly glare at the armed robber. The man quivered under the ferocious gaze and dropped the gun which clattered to the floor. Zack kicked it away and Tifa turned to fully get a look at her attacker. "I remember you; I kicked you out almost two weeks ago for stealing wallets from my customers."

"You alright?" asked Zack as his gaze softened towards her. She nodded and his cold gaze returned to the man. "I'm sorry, I wasn't gonna shoot her, I swear! I just wanted the gil!"

That's when Zack lost his cool, "You want gil than earn it honestly! Don't steal it from others who bust their ass for it! People like you make me sick! And pulling a gun on someone? How low can you sink? Scumbags like you disgust me! Thinking you can take gil from others just because you can? Maybe I should just snap your neck, just because _I _can?"

"No, please don't!" the man begged, but Zack ignored him and tightened his grip, the man gurgled more before Zack pulled him into a headlock and twisted his neck. The man went limp and Tifa gasped. Zack didn't really just kill him, did he?!

Zack looked up and smiled, "Don't worry, I just used the ol' sleeper trick. He's not dead. I fooled him pretty good though, didn't I?"

Tifa let out a relieved sigh, "yeah, you had me fooled too."

Zack stood up after laying the man down on the floor, "Sorry, but I had to make it look good, I mean what kind of friend would I be if I didn't repay the one who saved my life?"

Tifa smiled up at him. She completely took back everything she originally thought about the SOLDIER in the past.

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><p>Update: Because everyone seems to want me to continue this, and your reviews were so amazing, seriously they made me cry happy tears. (You guys are awesome, thank you!) So, I am happy to announce that I will be continuing this. I don't know how often and I have to put together a decent plot, since I never really thought past this chapter to be perfectly honest, but I have done some brain storming and what I've come up with so far is promising, even though the plot's not completely figured out, I like where it's going. :) It may

take me a bit to bring out the next chapter and I will also focus more on details and surroundings, plus dive deeper into the minds of the characters (because I definitely see where I left out on that.) I look forward to writing this story and I hope you all enjoy it as the chapters come out. ^_^

End
file.